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STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE OPENING PLENARY SESSION OF THE OSCE 2010 REVIEW CONFERENCE

Warsaw, 30 September 2010

Mr. Chairperson,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to speak to you on behalf of the European Union (EU) at the opening plenary session of the OSCE 2010 Review Conference and specifically of its human dimension sessions.

I should like first of all to express the EU's gratitude to the Polish Government for the warm reception given to this meeting. I should also like to pay tribute to the Kazakh Chairmanship for all its efforts in the leadership of our Organization. The EU is also very grateful for the excellent work of Ambassador Janez Lenarčič and the staff of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on behalf of participating States.

The Review Conference opening today in Warsaw is the main forum in which OSCE participating States will prepare for the Astana Summit to be held on 1 and 2 December 2010. We should make the best use of it in order to attain our goal of providing the summit with a substantial agenda, comprising a clear reaffirmation of our commitments and specific mandates for our future work, set out in a plan of action. To this end, we should make full use of the work accomplished since the launching of the Corfu Process and the many proposals made over the past year.

I shall summarize in this context the EU's four main priorities, some of which directly concern the human dimension:

- Strengthening the Organization's capacities within the three dimensions in order to promote early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation, among other things, in connection with protracted conflicts;
- Strengthening the implementation and follow-up of OSCE norms, principles and commitments, in particular, human dimension commitments;
- Strengthening the framework for conventional arms control, including confidence- and security-building measures and progress on the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe;

- Paying greater attention to transnational threats within the OSCE's three dimensions.

I shall also recall the need to achieve specific breakthroughs in the resolution of protracted conflicts which, year after year, continue to seriously affect the credibility of our Organization and its capacity to tackle the security challenges arising in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian areas. Thus, we hope to attain the objectives that we set for the Corfu Process, namely:

- Re-establishing confidence and strengthening and modernizing the security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok;
- Preserving the comprehensive approach to security through the OSCE's three dimensions;
- Preserving the autonomy and integrity of the OSCE's institutions and ensuring that its executive structures can offer optimal assistance.

Our Organization is based on the conviction that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential factor of peace, justice and well-being. This conviction is the cornerstone of our comprehensive security concept. The implementation of our commitments within the human dimension is therefore crucial to our collective security. This realization led us to solemnly declare, in Moscow in 1991, that the commitments undertaken within the human dimension were a subject of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and not solely a matter for the internal affairs of States. The EU will therefore continue to fight human rights violations wherever they occur.

Far from being a humiliating experience, the peer evaluations carried out within the OSCE and the recommendations made by its institutions are an opportunity for participating States. They are an aid and an invitation to move forward, through a respectful dialogue, in the establishment of a security community based on respect for human rights, democracy and freedoms.

Mr. Chairperson,

The EU takes this opportunity to reiterate its concern at a certain slippage in the OSCE area as regards respect for human rights. It calls on all participating States to respect their commitments. Specifically, the EU expects that any participating State which assumes the chairmanship of the OSCE should set an example and demonstrate an unwavering commitment to human rights, democracy and freedoms. In this regard, it will be up to us to ensure that Astana represents a major turning-point in the eyes of future generations.

The EU does not consider itself to be the star pupil in the school of human rights. It accepts constructive criticism. Strengthening the protection of fundamental rights is a central aim of our policy. It was to this end that we signed on 7 December 2000 in Nice and reaffirmed on 1 December 2009 in Lisbon the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in order to recall our values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, this Charter became a legally binding instrument. In this regard, we pay tribute to the work of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, which, since 2007, has assisted the relevant institutions of the EU and its member States in improving the guarantees of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Agency has organized, with the

collaboration of the delegations of the EU and Belgium to the OSCE, a side event at this conference entitled “A fundamental right: asylum, theory and reality”.

I should like in this regard to stress the importance of optimal collaboration with other organizations with responsibilities in this area. We should note in particular the Council of Europe, which shares with the EU and the OSCE identical values based on the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Let us also recall the importance of the European Court of Human Rights, based in Strasbourg, which has jurisdiction to rule on individual or State applications alleging violations of the rights set forth in the European Convention on Human Rights.

This Review Conference presents a real opportunity for dialogue between representatives of governments and civil society. The EU attaches great value to the unhindered participation of non-governmental organizations and pays tribute to the courage of their members, who, often in difficult circumstances, are in the vanguard of the fight against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The EU will participate actively in this Conference and will not hesitate to clearly identify the areas in which progress still needs to be made. I shall cite in particular freedom of the media, freedom of association, the situation of human rights defenders, the abolition of the death penalty and efforts to counter intolerance and discrimination.

The EU reiterates its full support for the ODIHR. Its impartiality and autonomy make it a driving force and must be preserved. We appreciate in particular its expertise in the field of election observation, and would like to see mechanisms created to strengthen the follow-up and implementation of the ODIHR’s recommendations in this area.

An atmosphere of restored mutual understanding and confidence augurs well for a summit that will be an excellent occasion to strengthen the Corfu Process and move towards an “OSCE Plus”. The summit should provide a new momentum and mobilize the political will needed to break through a number of deadlocks that have hampered the functioning of our Organization for so many years.

In conclusion, the EU hopes that the Review Conference will enable us to advance towards a fuller and more robust implementation of our commitments and to further strengthen the human dimension within our comprehensive security concept.

Thank you for your attention.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia¹, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ and Iceland², the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia, and Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan, Andorra and San Marino align themselves with this statement.

1 Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

2 Iceland continues to be a member of the European Free Trade Association and the European Economic Area.